OET
Open English Translation

Open English Translation of the Bible

Ya'akov (James)

Introduction

Author

The author of this letter is commonly known as 'Ya'akov' in English translations, but most people don't realise that his English name should be Ya'akov (or Yakōbos if you wanted to be closer to the Koine Greek spelling). This translation error can be traced all the way back to Yohan Wycliffe's English translation from the Latin in the 1300's as he didn't have access to Greek New Testament manuscripts (although he did use Yacob in some parts of his New Testament when it referred to the son of Isaac). The confusion was probably due to changes in the way Latin was spoken over the centuries, and then translating the name from the historically-altered Latin instead of from the original Greek—see https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-topics/bible-versions-and-translations/james-or-jacob-in-the-bible for more details.

Note from the first sentence in the letter that Ya'akov addressed the letter to the twelve tribes who originated from the twelve sons of his namesake.

This letter

This *Letter from Ya'akov* is Ya'akov's collection of advice to those who believe there is a god in heaven. He wrote this to all people scattered all around the world. Ya'akov used examples in order to explain his advice, so that their behaviour would improve and also their daily work. He also taught on various topics like: faith, testing, suffering, showing, respect, good behaviour, watching what you say, true wisdom from God, and prayer.

He said that our faith is deficient if we don't also demonstrate it by our actions.

Main components of Ya'akov's letter

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The testing and the temptation *1:12-18*
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Lighter type marks additions. Underscores join parts of a single source word.

Struck words are untranslated. The ◘ sign marks a verse with no text.

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Readers' Version

1:1 This letter is from Ya'akov (James; Grk. Yakobos),[1] a slave for **God** and for the **master Yeshua (Jesus; Grk. Yesus) the messiah.** It's written to the tribes who have ended up dispersed into many nations: Greetings.

Gaining endurance and requesting wisdom

2 Be cheerful my fellow believers, when you face a range of difficult situations, **3** knowing that you will learn endurance as your faith is tested. **4** Let that endurance do its perfect work so that you all might become perfect and mature—not lacking anything.

5 If anyone of you is lacking wisdom, then it should be requested from **God** who gives it generously and without disparagement, and so it will be given to you, **6** but the person who's asking should demonstrate their faith and not be doubting. That's because a person who doubts is like a wave on the sea that's just blown and tossed around **7** and a person like that shouldn't expect to get anything from the **master** **8** because that person is double-minded, and everything they attempt ends up in difficulty.

Behaviour of the poor and the wealthy

9 Those of humbler means can boast about their greatness **10** whereas the wealthy can boast about their weakness because they'll pass away just like the daisies in the grass.[2] **11** When the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass, the flowers will drop and lose all their beauty. So too for rich people who'll fade away right in the middle of all their projects.

Testing and temptation

12 Any person who's enduring testing circumstances is fortunate, because once they've passed the test, they'll receive a crown of life that Yeshua (Jesus; Grk. Yesus) promised to those who love him. **13** No one should say 'It's **God** tempting me' when they're being tempted, because **God** can't be tempted to do evil and he doesn't tempt others, **14** but rather they're being tempted by their own lusts. They're being drawn away and enticed into what they know is wrong, **15** and after the desire is conceived it leads to sin, and once the sin is concluded it leads to death.

16 Don't be led astray, my dear brothers and sisters. **17** Every gift that's good and perfect comes from heaven. It comes down from the father of lights, none of which are changing or casting moving shadows. **18** Once he had decided it, he created us by his spoken commands so that we'd become a kind of special first 'harvest' out of all of his creatures.

Listening then doing

19 So my dear brothers and sisters, note this: Everyone should be quick to listen but slow to speak, and should be slow to get angry **20** because when people get very angry, it doesn't lead to the good behaviour that **God** expects. **21** So discard all moral filth and the evil that's plentiful, and humbly accept the message that's implanted in you all and which is capable of saving your souls.

22 Don't delude yourselves by just listening to the message, but put it into practice in your daily lives. **23** Anyone who is just a listener of the message and does nothing with it is like someone who looks at their face in a mirror **24** but goes away after having a look and then immediately forgets what they looked like. **25** However the person who investigates the perfect law that gives freedom, and then sticks with it, not being just an observer that forgets about it but rather a person who puts it into practice, this person will prosper in whatever they do.

26 If anyone supposes that they're religious but doesn't guard what comes out of their mouth, then that person's religion is only skin deep and hasn't affected their heart. **27** A person who wants to truly serve our **God** and father with a pure heart would be visiting orphans and widows in their difficulties and staying unstained by worldly ideas.

Avoiding favouritism

2:1 My dear brothers and sisters, as you live out your faith in our honoured **master Yeshua (Jesus; Grk. Yesus) the messiah**, don't show favouritism to others. **2** For example, if a man in nicely cut clothes and wearing an expensive gold ring came into to your meeting as well as a poor man in filthy clothes **3** and you told the well-dressed one, 'You sit here in this good chair,' while telling the poor man, 'You stand over here,' or 'You sit here on the mat,' **4** wouldn't that discrimination show that you have judged them with evil motives. **5** Listen my dear brothers and sisters, didn't **God** chose the poor in this world to be rich in faith and participants in the kingdom which he promises to those who love him? **6** But you dishonour the poor, even though it's the wealthier people who oppress you and bring court cases against you. **7** And aren't they the ones who slander the very God that you pray to?

Judgement and mercy

8 However if you are obeying the golden law, then when you love your neighbour as yourself,[3] you'll be doing well according to the scriptures. **9** But if you're showing favouritism, then you're all sinning by breaking the law. **10** Because anyone who tries to keep the law but slips up in one area, they're still guilty of breaking the law. **11** The same God who said, 'Don't commit adultery,'[4] also said, 'Don't murder,'[5] so if you're not committing adultery but you murder someone, then you've broken the law. **12** So speak and live your life knowing that you're going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, **13** because judgement will be dispensed without mercy to those who haven't been putting mercy into practice. Yes, mercy wins out over judgement.

Faith in action

14 My fellow believers, what would I gain if I said that someone had faith but it didn't alter

1 RV 1:1 · Cross-ref. Mat 13:55; Mrk 6:3; Acts 15:13; Gal 1:19.

2 RV 1:10-11 · Cross-ref. Isa 40:6-7 (LXX).

3 RV 2:8 · Cross-ref. Lev 19:18.

4 RV 2:11 · Cross-ref. Exo 20:14; Deu 5:18.

5 RV 2:11 · Cross-ref. Exo 20:13; Deu 5:17.

how they live their life? Faith like that wouldn't be able to
save them. 15 If a fellow believer is lacking clothes or food,
16 and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace and be warm
and satisfied,' but don't help with their physical needs,
what use would that be? 17 In other words, faith without
the corresponding lifestyle is just dead.

18 No doubt someone will say, 'Well you have the faith
and I do the good deeds.' So show me your faith without
good deeds and I'll demonstrate my faith *by* my good
deeds. 19 You believe that there's one **God** and you're right,
but even the demons believe that and shudder. 20 But the
vain person still wants to know if faith without good deeds
is wasted? 21 Wasn't our ancestor Avraham considered
right with God due to his *actions* when he offered up his
son Yitshak (Isaac) on the altar?[6] 22 So his faith was work-
ing together with his actions, and it was by his actions that
his faith was perfected. 23 This fulfilled the scripture that
says, 'Avraham believed in **God** and so he was consider to
be right with God,[7] and was called a friend **of God**.'[8] 24 So
you can see that a person is considered right with God due
to his actions, and not just by their 'faith'. 25 Similarly the
prostitute Rahav was made right by her actions when she
welcomed the Hebrew messengers and then helped them
get away by a different route.[9] 26 Just like a body is dead
once the spirit has departed, so too faith is dead if it's not
demonstrated by good deeds.

The tongue

3:1 My brothers and sisters, not ev-
eryone should desire to be a teacher because we know that
us teachers will be judged more strictly. 2 We all stumble in
many ways. If there was someone who never said anything
wrong, this person would be perfect and also able to have
self-control over their entire body. 3 With a horse, we can
put a bridle into its mouth so we can make them do what
we want, and so we can direct the whole animal. 4 Simi-
larly, even huge ships that are being driven on by strong
winds are controlled by a small rudder and can be steered
wherever the captain desires. 5 So too the tongue is only
small but can make extensive claims.

Yes, a tiny flame can ignite an entire forest 6 and the
tongue is a fire producing a torrent of depravity. It's a part
of our physical body but capable of staining us all over and
setting our worlds on fire, because the tongue itself is set
on fire from hell. 7 Every kind of wild animal and birds and
reptiles and sea creature can be tamed and has been tamed
by humankind 8 but no one is able to tame the tongue—it's
an erratically evil body part that's full of deadly poison.
9 We use it to bless our **master** and father, yet we use it to
curse our fellow humans who are made in **God's** image.[10]
10 Both blessings and curses come out of the same mouth!
My brothers and sisters, it shouldn't be like that. 11 Surely
a spring flowing out of a single cavity can't produce both
good-tasting and bitter water. 12 A fig tree can't produce
olives and a grape vine can't produce figs, my brothers and
sisters, just like a salty supply can't give fresh water.

Heavenly wisdom

13 Any of you that are wise and un-
derstanding should demonstrate their good deeds and wis-
dom by their godly living. 14 But if you are full of bitter
jealousy or selfish ambition, don't be boasting or denying
the truth 15 because none of that came down to you from
heaven, but on the contrary it's earthly and soulish and
demonic. 16 Wherever you find jealousy and selfish ambi-
tion, you'll also find disharmony and all kinds of evil. 17 In
contrast, the wisdom that comes from God is pure, peace-
able, gentle, compliant, full of mercy and good behaviour,
unceasing, and not hypocritical. 18 Those who desire peace
sow the seeds that will produce godly behaviour.

Don't befriend the world

4:1 Where do you imagine that the
fights and quarrels among you all
originate? Isn't it because of the ambitions that surface in-
side you? 2 You all have wants that are not fulfilled so it
leads to murder. You're jealous and not able to get every-
thing you want, so you quarrel and fight. You don't have,
because you haven't asked God, 3 and when you all do ask,
it doesn't get answered because you ask with wrong mo-
tives—trying get what you want to spend on your own
wants. 4 You're just like prostitutes. Don't you realise that
if you befriend the world then you're opposing **God**, so
anyone who befriends the world makes themself an enemy
of God. 5 Do you think that the scripture means nothing
when it says, 'God's **spirit** jealously longs to live in us'?
6 However, he's good at giving grace so that's why it says,
'**God** opposes proud people but gives grace to humble
ones.'[11] 7 So strive then **to** do what **God** wants of you. Re-
sist the devil and he will flee away from you. 8 When you
all approach **God**, he will move closer to you. So keep your
hands clean you sinners, and keep your hearts pure you
who can't make up your minds about God. 9 Be miserable,
and mourn and weep. Change your laughing into crying
and your happiness into sadness 10 because when you
humble yourselves towards **Yahweh**, he will be the one to
lift you up.

Avoid judging others

11 My fellow believers, don't make
false accusations against each other because anyone who
falsely accuses or judges a fellow believer, is slandering
against the law and judging it. But if you're the ones judg-
ing the law, then you're not a follower of the law but a
judge of it. 12 There's only one lawgiver and judge and
that's the one who is able to save and to destroy. So who do
you think you are to judge your neighbour!

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6 **RV 2:21 · Cross-ref.** Gen 22:1-14.

7 **RV 2:23 · Cross-ref.** Gen 15:6.

8 **RV 2:23 · Cross-ref.** 2Ch 20:7; Isa 41:8.

9 **RV 2:25 · Cross-ref.** Josh 2:1-21.

10 **RV 3:9 · Cross-ref.** Gen 1:26.

11 **RV 4:6 · Cross-ref.** Prv 3:34 (LXX).

Readers' Version

Avoid boasting and presumption

13 Now you all might say, 'Today or tomorrow we'll go into the city to work there for a year and do some trading to make some money.'[12] 14 But you don't know what tomorrow will bring, because what are your lives? You're like a vapour that appears for a brief period and then it's gone. 15 So instead of saying that, you should say, 'If the **master** wants it, we will live and we'll do this or that.' 16 But as it is, you've all been boasting in your arrogance and that's an evil attitude. 17 Any person who knows that there's some good thing that they should be doing, but doesn't do it, is sinning.

The bad ending of wealthy prigs

5:1 So you wealthy people, come and cry about the miseries that are about to hit you all. 2 Your riches have rotted and your clothes have become moth-eaten.[13] 3 Your gold and silver has corroded, and that corrosion will speak out against you and will eat away your bodies like fire because you stored up wealth in this final age. 4 The unpaid wages of the workers who harvested your fields are crying out[14] and the desperate requests of those harvesters have been heard by army commander **Yahweh**. 5 You have indulged yourselves and lived luxuriously but you've been fattening yourselves up as the time for your slaughter approaches. 6 You all convicted innocent people and had them executed, even when they weren't doing anything against you.

Wait patiently

7 So my fellow believers, be patient until the return of Yeshua (Jesus; Grk. Yesus) our **master**. You see how farmers look forward to the fruit to be ready—waiting patiently even while they monitor the early and the late rains. 8 All of you should be patient too, and encourage each other in your faith because the **master's** return is closer now.

9 And don't moan about each other, my fellow believers, so that you all won't be judged for it, because truly, the judge is just outside about to come in the doors. 10 Look at the prophets who spoke out **the** messages from **Yahweh**—they're good examples of suffering and patience for you to follow 11 and now we consider them as heroes for their endurance. You all heard about Iyov's (Job's) endurance[15] and then you yourselves witnessed what happened to Yeshua our **master**, and you saw his compassion and mercy.[16]

12 But most importantly, brothers and sisters, don't swear by heaven or earth or by any other kind of oath but simply be honest so that 'yes' means yes and 'no' means no,[17] then you won't end up getting judged.

The power of prayer and restoration

13 Is anyone among you going through hard times? If so, they should be praying. Is anyone feeling cheerful? If so, they should be singing praises. 14 Is anyone among you sick? If so, that person should call the leaders of the assembly and get them to anoint them with oil[18] and to pray for them in the name and authority of Yeshua (Jesus; Grk. Yesus) our **master**. 15 Then that declaration of faith will save the weak person and the **master** will lift him/her up, and if they've sinned, then their sins will also be forgiven. 16 So confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that all of you can be healed, because when an obedient believer prays, it has a real effect. 17 Eliyah (Elijah) was a person just similar to us, and when he prayed for the rain to stop, it stopped, and it didn't rain again for three and a half years.[19] 18 Then he prayed again, and the rain came down from the sky and the land sprouted and started to bear fruit again.[20]

19 My fellow believers, if any of you have wandered from the truth and someone helps them back, 20 then you should know that someone who helps a sinner to come back from their deceitful ways will be saving their soul from death, and their many sins can be forgiven.[21]

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12 **RV 4:13-14 · Cross-ref.** Prv 27:1.
13 **RV 5:2-3 · Cross-ref.** Mat 6:19.
14 **RV 5:4 · Cross-ref.** Deu 24:14-15.
15 **RV 5:11 · Cross-ref.** Yob 1:21-22; 2:10.
16 **RV 5:11 · Cross-ref.** Psa 103:8.
17 **RV 5:12 · Cross-ref.** Mat 5:34-37.
18 **RV 5:14 · Cross-ref.** Mrk 6:13.
19 **RV 5:17 · Cross-ref.** 1Ki 17:1; 18:1.
20 **RV 5:18 · Cross-ref.** 1Ki 18:42-45.
21 **RV 5:20 · Cross-ref.** Prv 10:12; 1Pe 4:8.